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ABSTRACT

This book recounts how American schools undertook reform after reform, based on unproven and unworkable theories, resulting in attention being diverted from the schools' essential purpose: the intellectual development of every child. American educators have committed three historical errors. First, they tried to turn the school into a vehicle for social reform. Second, they assumed that large numbers of children were incapable of learning much that schools traditionally taught. Third, they believed that teaching knowledge was less important than engaging students in activities and experiences. These errors undermined educational opportunity and equality. Results included a lowering of academic expectations and pressure to enlarge individual schools so that they can offer multiple tracks to children with different occupational goals. The 20th century saw a series of reform movements in education that proved to be little more than reactions to deficiencies created by previous movements. Improvements are possible by maintaining a focus on what schools do best: teach knowledge. Children also need well-educated teachers who are eclectic in their methods and willing to use different strategies depending on what works best for which children. The book ends with notes organized by chapter, a select bibliography, and an index. (RT)

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